

THE RICO TIMES

RICO, COLORADO

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Water and Sewer Problems Continue in Rico

BAD WATER

"Water, water everywhere and not a drop to drink," this line from the rhyme of the Ancient Mariner rang true for Ricoians this week as the boil order remained in force.

After several weeks of heavy rains the Rico water system became too turbid to run through the 1 micron filter in Rico's water treatment facility. With water running only through the 10 micro filters, the water would not test out for drinking and a boil order was put into effect for the town of Rico.

At the September 3 Town Board meeting, Bob Anderson, from the Water Dept. reported that the quality of the water going through the system had greatly improved, but the state testing process could take some time. This would mean the boil order could remain in effect for quite a while longer.

Besides the problems with turbidity and filtering, Anderson also reported a continuing problem with leaks in the iron pipes that deliver the water to homes and businesses of Rico. The Utility Technical Services have been attempting to locate the leaks, but progress was slow as there was the possibility of more than one leak and access to the pipes is sometimes a problem.

Agreeing that the water system was inadequate, Trustee Peter Carter reminded the audience that the drinking water had not been under a boil order since the system was first upgraded in the early nineties. At that time a grant was awarded to Rico to upgrade the system. The upgrades were a new filtration system, storage tank and improved service — which included supplying water to West Rico. The upgrades also brought a water waste problem under control.

Even with the upgrades the system was still a problem. With no consumption study, the system was inadequate for the town and especially for any future growth.

Pipe leaks continue to plague the system. The filtration system is expensive and unable to handle the turbidity that seasonal runoff, heavy



Untreated water that flows out of the St. Louis mine.

rains and mineral leaching cause. The collection gallery is at the bottom of an avalanche chute.

In an attempt to deal with these many problems the Board has commissioned test drilling at the "S" turn north of Rico. A natural aquifer under the "S" turn could solve many of our water problems: it would not need filtration, would not be vulnerable to natural events, and would be very cost effective.

SEWER TROUBLES

As bothersome as the boil order is, the subject most on the minds of Ricoians is the proposed sewer system.

After months of meeting, re-

views and reports, the Board attempted to pass a resolution that would increase water rates by \$10.00. These revenues were to help pay for a study and create a war chest to cover future expenses that the Board felt sure would creep up as process of evaluation continued.

The idea of a rate increase spurred a lively and at times intense debate over the Boards' moving to quickly forward before a study could be done.

After an hour of discussion the Board failed the resolution and opted to only go forward with the study. A government grant will pay

for 80% of the study, with Rico paying the other 20% (about \$4,000).

Colorado State Officials warned that, without some action plan for community growth the sewer problem could only get worse, and if the town did nothing about the system a developer could install a system nearby that would drastically reduce Ricos options for their own system.

They also stated that due to the soil conditions of this region, there was very little chance the present septic tank systems could be in compliance. Although the river was testing well under State standards, the ground in Rico could still be saturated. Bob Anderson expressed concern about the water pipes running through sewage saturated leach fields, discovered as leaks in the water system were being fixed.

To increase the comfort level of local citizens the Board has agreed to consider a special assessment to cover the costs of the study instead of an increase in water fees.

MINE OUTFLOW

The outflow from the St. Louis mine and from the Mill continue to flow unchecked into the tailing ponds and into Silver Creek.

The St. Louis mine treatment facility was turned off last September by a previous property owner when he had his holdings, which included the Mill and the St. Louis treatment facility re-surveyed. The result was disputed by Rico Renaissance, who ended up with the property. Rico Renaissance felt they had been unfairly stuck with problem property.

The uppermost tailing pond is filling up with silt quickly and leaching into the Dolores has begun.

ARCO declined to work on the discharge at the mill site last summer because they felt it was too big of a problem for them and that it would qualify for Super Fund cleanup. The discharge continues to flow unchecked into Silver Creek.

The Rico Town Board is like the little boy and the leaky dam. Every time they fix one leak, two others have sprung.